



**Department of Energy**  
Western Area Power Administration  
Desert Southwest Customer Service Region  
P.O. Box 6457  
Phoenix, AZ 85005-6457

Ms. Debbie MacAller  
U. S. Fish & Wildlife Service  
Carlsbad Fish and Wildlife Office  
2730 Lokar Avenue West  
Carlsbad, CA 92008-6603

Dear Ms. MacAller:

Enclosed please find a copy of the Biological Assessment for the Blythe Energy Project. The Western Area Power Administration (Western) is the lead Federal Agency for the project, with the California Energy Commission as the co-lead for the siting and environmental review. Western advised the Arizona and Carlsbad, California Field Offices of our involvement in this project, as the lead Federal Agency on June 9, 2000.

The proposed action, a "merchant" power plant, will provide some relief from the electricity shortfall that is ongoing in southern California. This project will not stimulate growth in the Blythe area due to the nature of merchant power plants in general. Merchant plants do not supply electricity to any particular utility or to a specific load. They provide bulk electricity to the open market, such that the power generated is transmitted over long distances to serve existing needs in other locations. The power at a merchant plant is not intended for local use. Additionally, Western has found no indication that there are any non-Federal projects planned in the foreseeable future, indicating that there are no indirect or cumulative impacts associated with the project.

Western prepared the enclosed Biological Assessment in accordance with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service regulations found at 50 CFR 402 for the following ten species.

Bonytail chub (*Gila elegans*)  
Desert pupfish (*Cyprinodon macularis*)  
Gila topminnow (*Poeciliopsis occidentalis occidentalis*)  
Razorback sucker (*Xyrauchen texanus*)  
Mojave desert tortoise (*Gopherus agassizii*)  
Bald eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*)  
Brown pelican (*Pelicanus occidentalis*)  
Southwestern willow flycatcher (*Empidonax traillii extimus*)  
Yuma clapper rail (*Rallus longirostris yumanensis*)  
Mountain plover (*Charadrius montanus*)

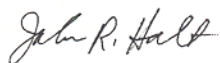
Western has determined the proposed action, as described in the Preliminary Staff Assessment/Draft Environmental Assessment (enclosed) will not affect any of the fish or bird species listed above. This determination is based on the mitigation agreed to by the applicant, and described in the Biological Assessment and other documents enclosed.

Western has determined that the Mojave desert tortoise may be affected but is not likely to be adversely affected because of:

1. discountable or insignificant effects due to the lack of habitat and tortoise sign, indicating lack of usage of the project area;
2. the mitigation agreed upon to exclude tortoises from the site during and after construction; and
3. beneficial affects resulting from an agreement between the applicant and the California Energy Commission.

In the agreement, the applicant will compensate for the acreage of the plant site and pipeline at a ratio of 1:1. This will result in a total compensation package of \$83,210, which will be used to purchase tortoise habitat and provide for an endowment to manage that habitat.

Sincerely,



John Holt  
Environmental Manager

cc  
Mr. David L. Harlow  
U. S. Fish & Wildlife Service  
Arizona Ecological Services Field Office  
2321 West Royal Palm Road, Suite 103  
Phoenix, AZ 85021-4951

Mr. Duong Nguyen  
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency  
Region 9  
Air Division, MC: Air-3  
75 Hawthorne Street  
San Francisco, CA 94105

Mr. Richard L. Anderson  
California Energy Commission  
1516 9<sup>th</sup> Street, MS 40  
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bcc:

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